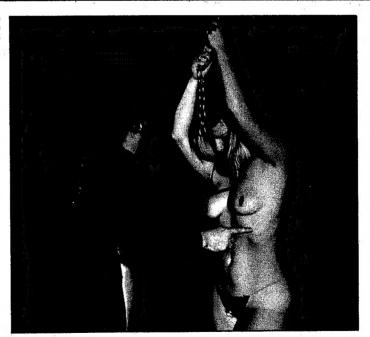
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cover photo of Frankie Smith by Ron Vogel





edo the champ of the moment and his little brother was pushing for the champ's belt!

DAME ON ICE

AT THE END OF the round, the crowd began to boo. I grinned and walked back to my corner.

Max looked me over for cuts and couldn't find any. "You're disappointing the betting customers. They read in the papers that you were going to flatten Novak in the sixth."

"He's a little hard to catch," I said.

I had been watching the blonde in the second

row and she had been watching me.

"Novak's girl," Max said. "But keep your mind on the fight. It's possible The Great O'Brien can get knocked out by a human being with two hands and a little luck."

The warning buzzer sounded and I got up. The arena was filled right up to where the boys had to

— turn the page

ICE, from page 7

use binoculars, but I was thinking about our closed-circuit television deal. That's where the real money was now days.

At the bell, I came out easy.

For six rounds I'd taken it slow and Novak hadn't been a ball of fire himself — mainly because it was his ambition to be on his feet at the end of the fifteenth round.

But now it was round seven and I could see it in his eyes that he was beginning to think that maybe The Great O'Brien was made out of newsprint.

I moved in close and raised my left elbow so that he could get a shot at my ribs. The short right he threw was about as light as I'd expected, but I decided to wince and hold on.

The crowd got excited about that. Maybe there'd be an upset.

The referee pushed us apart and I retreated. Novak tasted the possibility that he had a chance of winning and he found it easy to swallow. He came at me and bounced a right off my cheekbone. I shook my head like I was trying to readjust something and backed against the ropes.

That was enough for Novak. He knew what he saw and he turned into a tiger. He came at me flailing eagerly with both hands and hoping for the million-dollar punch.

Maybe I smiled. But anyway I straightened him with a left and then levered over the pay-off punch. Novak didn't even have time to look surprised before he went down.

I leaned against the ropes in a neutral corner and let the ref finish his counting.

Back in my corner, Max draped the robe over my shoulders. "You make it look too easy. Now don't forget to pat Novak on the shoulder when he comes over to congratulate you."

I looked at Novak's girl and I could see that she wasn't anymore.

Max put a towel over my head. "She'll cost you money."

It took a little while before Novak's handlers got him in condition to come over.

And then Max took me down to the dressing room where the reporters were waiting with their questions.

"Did Novak have you in trouble at the beginning of the seventh?"

"He hit me. That's all I know."

"You said you were going to knock him out in the sixth. What happened?"

"I can't count too well when my fingers and toes are covered up." "There's a rumor that you're starting to write poetry."

"I'm thinking about it," I said.
"Been reading the Collected Works
of Edgar A. Guest."

"Are you fighting Dawson next?"
"Why not? He's about the only one who's left."

"Are you predicting a round?"

"How does the fourth sound?"
"Your brother fought in one of the

"Your brother fought in one of the preliminaries. Did you see the bout?"

"No. But I heard he won."

It went on like that for about fifteen minutes and then I took a shower.

The next morning I slept late and was having breakfast in our hotel suite with Max when Al Hawks of the Chronicle walked in.

He made himself at home by sitting down. "I read my column this morning and it says that you're going to fight Dawson in September. Should I believe it?"

Max buttered a slice of toast. "You know the routine as well as anybody, Al. With our tax laws we can't afford to fight more than once a year. But we like to keep the public interested."

"So what happens in September?"
"We announce that we can't get
together with Dawson on terms and
the whole thing's postponed until at

least January."

Hawks smiled slightly. "And then in January you tell the papers that you've decided to switch the fight from Miami to Chicago? And that carries it until April? What next?"

"Then either O'Brien or Dawson develops a backache. That takes us to July. A good month for a gate. We figure the eighteenth is a nice night. But don't tell anybody or we'll change the script."

The phone purred and Max picked it up.

He listened for a few seconds and then turned to me. "I can't see through the wires, but I'm guessing it's Novak's blonde. She's in the lobby."

"Tell her to come up," I said. "I'll get undressed."

"Look," Max said. "I never figured you for dumb. This one passes from hand to hand."

"You worried about my health?"

"I'm thinking about your pocketbook. A dame like this one can take you for every cent you got."

Hawks shook his head. "That's the only thing you won't have to worry about. Her old man's got more dough than a presidential candidate."

Max sighed and put the phone to his mouth. "Okay, baby, toddle up here. We're all waiting." She came up in five minutes and stood in the doorway smiling lazily. "The room is awfully crowded."

"I was here first," Max said sourly. "And I'm not through with breakfast yet."

She moved into the room and sat down beside me. "My name's Lila. But maybe you know that?"

"Everybody does," Al Hawks said.
"And I've seen those glowing eyes at ringside. They get especially bright when they see blood. Anybody's blood."

"My, my," Lila said. "What nice friends you have, Tommy."

I looked her over. "Let me guess. Basically you hate men. That's why you get your kicks seeing them beat up."

She stroked my hair. "You sound just like my psychiatrist."

"I'll bet you drive him nuts."
She smiled. "I might decide to eat you too, Tommy."

"You can try, baby," I said. "But it's a big job."

My brother, Pete, came out of the shower with a towel around his waist. He saw Lila and ducked back into the bedroom. When he came back he wore a bathrobe.

Al Hawks lit a cigarette. "I guess you won your bout too last night."

Pete nodded. "TKO. The third round."

"I saw it," Al said. "And I didn't have you ahead when it was stopped. Harrison was a bleeder." He studied Pete. "What's your record now?"

"Twelve and two," Pete said.

Al puffed the cigarette. "In other words you lose one out of seven?"

I took it easy for the next month and then hit the banquet circuit. I met Novak at a sports writers dinner in Cleveland.

"You look great," I said.

He grinned. "I'll let you clobber me any time if I get a purse like the last one." He looked around. "Where's Lila?"

"At the hotel," I said. "She doesn't care much for chicken and peas."

"How is she?"

"Fine."

He cleared his throat. "That isn't what I meant."

"Like ice," I said.

He nodded. "What's with her?"

"Her father didn't play jacks with her when she was a kid."

He thought about it. "She had me worried for a while. I thought it was me."

"No," I said. "It's every one of us."
"I kept her around because she

looked nice. Same thing with you?"
"About that."

He sighed. "So why does she chase us?"

"She wants to bring us down," I said. "And be there when it happens."

Novak agreed. "I didn't cry when she left because I expected it." He decided to change the subject. "You'll probably take Dawson in five."

"Four."

He grinned again. "You got it, O'Brien. One like you comes along every twenty years."

"Fifty," I said.

At nine, I gave my little talk, signed some autographs, and went back to the hotel.

Lila had a drink next to her chair, but I thought it was probably the Don't you want me to love you?"

"No," I said. "I like you the way you are. When we say goodbye I won't get all choked up."

She threw the glass, but I stepped aside. "Let's get packed, baby. The plane leaves in an hour."

In January Max invited some reporters to our hotel and told them that we'd decided to fight in Chicago instead of Miami and that would put the bout off until April.

When they left, he poured himself a drink: "Tommy," he said. "I think maybe you ought to have a talk with your brother."

"What about?"

same one that had been there when I left.

She seemed pensive.

"Why don't you try a Cleveland psychiatrist?" I asked.

She looked up. "It doesn't matter where you go, they all give the same courses. Do you suppose I'll ever graduate?"

"No," I said. "You don't want to."
She picked up the drink. "What
the hell do you know about it?"

"I took a correspondence course in psychiatry once," I said. "You want to hurt. But total it up, baby. Was anybody ever really hurt when you left? Go down the list."

Her eyes glowed. "Why be nasty?

"The boy doesn't belong in the

"Why not? His record's fourteen and two now."

"I know," Max said, "But you ever seen him fight?"

"No. I was always busy at something else."

"Sure," Max said. "Sure."

"All right," I said. "We'll see his next one."

We flew to San Francisco the first week in February.

Pete's bout was a six-rounder and the O'Brien name got a good hand when he was introduced.

I looked over his opponent. "Who is this punk, Gray?"

"No punk," Max said. "He's a comer."

At the bell, Pete came threequarters of the way across the ring. Gray didn't waste that much energy. He was waiting with a hard, straight left.

Pete swarmed over him, throwing rights and lefts without playing favorite, but Gray took them on his elbows. He chopped a short right to Pete's head.

Pete blinked, but kept moving in for more punishment.

"Who the hell's been teaching him?" I asked.

"His teachers are the best," Max said. "They did what they could."

At the end of the round Pete walked back to his corner with blood trickling from a cut over his left eye.

"He takes five punches in order to deliver one," Max said. "The brainy type, isn't he?"

"Shut up," I said.

Pete came out full of steam again for the second round. Gray let him divide the air into sections with a half-a-dozen roundhouse swings and then moved in and went for the head.

I was leaning forward. "Damn it, why doesn't he cover up and hold?"

"The O'Brien pride," Max said.
"His brother doesn't cover up and hold. He doesn't get hit like that either."

I got up.

"Where are you going?" Max asked. "For cigarettes or something like that?"

"Yeah." I went down to the dressing rooms and waited.

After a while Pete came in with his handlers. His left eye was shut and the cut above it was now a gash. He saw me and shook his head. "Raw decision."

"It went that far?" I shooed his handlers out of the room. "I'll get to the point," I said. "Pete, you better hang up the gloves."

He flushed. "It was his lucky night. I'll get a rematch."

"It wasn't his lucky night," I said.
"And it wasn't your unlucky one.
It's time to get off the trolley before you walk around mumbling about the pretty daisies."

The flush deepened. "I'm willing to work. I know I got a lot to learn."

"If you don't know by now, you never will. This isn't your trade. Just because one O'Brien's in the ring doesn't mean that every O'Brien belongs there."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "Look, kid. You've seen what happens when people eat too many gloves. Do you want to wind up

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ICE, from page 9

sweeping floors and making funny faces for a quarter?"

He brushed the hand away. "Maybe that's not what's really worrying you."

"What do you mean?"

He met my eyes. "You're in my weight class."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It means that some day I'll be up there and we'll have to step in the same ring. That's what bothers you, isn't it?

I closed my eyes. "Damn it, you're talking crazy. You're not in my class and never will be."

He took off the robe. "Get the hell out of here. I got a shower to take."

When I got back to the hotel, Max and Lila were waiting.

"No dice?" Max asked.

"He's got the O'Brien ego," I said.
"But not the brains." I looked at
Lila. "Did you get a kick out of this
one?"

Lila smiled and said nothing.

Max lit a cigar. "While you were still there, she was watching you. Not the fight."

Pete had another bout in April and won the decision. In June he lost and was floored twice while he was doing it.

I came down from my training camp after that and had another talk with him, but I got nowhere.

On the sixteenth of July, Max and I were in Chicago for the title bout weigh-in.

The night of the fight, I climbed into the ring a few minutes before nine.

While we were in the center of the ring for instructions, I studied Dawson. He was compactly built and the scar tissue above his eyes showed that he'd been around for a while. His record stood at forty-two and six, but he had only twelve knockouts to his credit.

We shook hands and went back to our corners.

At the bell we both moved out without being in a hurry. I had the reach on Dawson and so his best bet was to stay in close. But for the time being, at least, he decided just to keep away from me.

We both put out a few jabs that were short. I backed up a little, but Dawson was an old pro who wasn't going to be rushed into anything this early in the fight.

After two minutes the crowd be-

gan to get restless and the referee was wondering whether he should talk to us

I livened things up by putting a

— turn to page 24











GREATEST ARRAY OF FULL COLOR NUDES EVER!

left hook to the side of Dawson's jaw.

He ducked his way into a clinch, but I knew it was only because he wanted to get a look at the clock. He was saving his energy for the last thirty seconds when anything he did would show up better on the score cards.

The referee parted us two more times before Dawson decided to fight. I blocked two left hooks, but then his right whistled across and caught me on the jaw. It made me stop and think, and while I was doing that, the same type of punch caught me again.

By the time the round ended, two more of those rights made me know that I had a left side to my face.

In our corner, Max looked me over. "That's the first time I seen The Great O'Brien get tagged four times in one round."

"That's his hesitation punch," I said. "If this was baseball, the ump would call a balk."

During the next round I tried to figure out that right. From the receiving end, it looked like he was going to throw it, changed his mind, and then decided he might as well do it anyway. It kept getting me.

In my corner, while we waited for the start of the third, Max was thoughtful. "Besides that hesitation punch, he's been studying movies of your fights and he's found a hole in your defense. But I got a solution. Why don't you hit back?"

In the third, I used my reach to keep him on his heels most of the time. He didn't care much for that and kept trying to worm in, but I kept space between the two of us.

Toward the end of the round, I tested by own right. It was in good working order and the second one I threw put Dawson down on one knee for a six count.

He was up and holding at the bell. Max was a lot happier when I sat down on the stool. He sponged my face. "Looks more like old times."

When the warning buzzer sounded, the crowd began to roar. This was the fourth round and the one in which I was going to put Dawson away.

When I came out, I was smiling. Dawson didn't smile, but he wasn't afraid either. Just cautious. He knew what was supposed to happen in this round as well as anybody in the arena.

I decided to get it over with quick. I worked a couple of hard lefts to his body to get his guard down. They didn't work, so I tried again.

And then I saw it.

The movement forward, the hesitation, and then the steaming right.

He had his feet in concrete when he threw the punch and I would have had to break an ankle to twist out of the way.

The punch shut off all sound except the dull faraway thud when my back hit the canvas.

I didn't hear the ref count.

I didn't see anything either until the ringside doc thumbed open one of my eyelids to see if I was still there.

I lay on my back, still in the center of the ring, and Dawson was the new champ.

somebody applied the smelling salts. I didn't move a muscle and eventually everybody crowding around me decided that I was a stretcher case.

I got a fast ride to the hospital and was wheeled directly to the X-ray room.

Forty minutes later, I lay on a clean bed.

I fell asleep.

When I awoke, I slitted my eyes a fraction of an inch.

Max stood at the foot of the bed smoking a cigar. "Well," he said. "Did you have a nice sleep? According to the X-rays there isn't a damn thing wrong with anything in-



When the doc took his fingers out of my eye, I let the lid snap shut again.

Here was The Great O'Brien racked up and put away by a pug who didn't rate a footnote in ring history. I knew what Patterson felt like when he ducked out of town behind the beard.

I considered keeping my eyes shut forever, just lying there until some-body carried...

And then something clicked in my head and it wasn't a blood vessel.

Hell, I thought, what's gone is gone, but maybe we can still keep this from being a total loss.

I kept my eyes shut, even when

side your skull."

I kept both eyes closed and said nothing.

"Of course," Max said, "X-rays don't tell everything. Maybe they'll push you into the meat room and do one of them exploratory operations."

I decided that this might get a little more complicated than I'd expected. I might need Max's help to arrange some things.

I opened my eyes.

"That's better," Max said. "Now what the hell are you up to?"

I grinned. "I'm going to enjoy a coma for about two weeks and then I'll recover. Without the operation, Max."

"So what's the big reason?"

"I want Pete to see me like this." Max scratched his earlobe. "And you think that's going to make him

quit the ring?"

"When he sees what can happen even to The Great O'Brien, it should pull him up short and make him think. You got any better ideas?"

Max worried his cigar for a while and then said, "Pete was at the fight and he happens to be in the waiting room now. I'll send him up.'

Pete came into the room fifteen minutes later. "You can open your eyes, Tommy. Max told me that you're faking the coma."

"Damn, Max," I snapped.

Pete smiled faintly. "But I'm giving up the ring anyway, Tommy. You win."

I stared at him suspiciously. "How the hell did I manage to win?"

"What really got me," Pete said, "is when Max told me that you threw the fight."

"Threw the ... " I sat up. "What else did good old Max tell you?"

"He said that you threw the fight. that you were faking the coma, and that you were giving up the ring for good.

"Is that right?"

He nodded. "So if you're willing to go through all of that just to teach me a lesson, what else can I do but step out of the ring?" He smiled again. "Was I that bad?"

"No. It's just that some are bet-

He cleared his throat. "About giving up the ring, Tommy. You don't have to go that far. You can lick Dawson 365 days a year."

"364," I said.

"You're one of the greatest."

"Yeah," I said. "And Max doesn't do so bad either.'

When he left, Max came back. He grinned. "I always say that when you got to lay it on, lay it on thick."

I put my hands behind my head. "I kind of miss Lila. Where is she? On Dawson's lap?"

"No. She's outside crying. I guess I didn't get around to telling her that your coma was an act."

"Hell," I said. "Nobody cries for me."

"Maybe you don't want anyone to. Maybe you could use a psychiatrist yourself." He chewed on his cigar and watched me. "This might be a good time to get rid of her. Like I once said, she's been around and . . . "

"Shut up, Max," I said. "Mind your own damn business." I got out of bed. "Get me some clothes, Max. Am I supposed to walk out of here wearing this little nightie?"



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HH-113



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